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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a method of teaching international and intercultural communication, which has proved successful at the graduate level at Eastern Illinois University in meeting the following minimal goals: providing a uniform set of definitions concerning crosscultural communication, allowing an in-depth examination of the unique intercultural communication problems between the general population and ethnic groups emigrating to America, providing extensive experience in interacting with people of other cultures, encouraging insight into methods to help overcome cultural barriers, and allowing experiences in investigating, analyzing, and reporting on a culture of the students' choice. Attached to this report is a daily schedule of class activities. (KS)

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"TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ON THE GRADUATE LEVEL,"

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Prepared for delivery before the International-Intercultural Division of the Speech Communication Association at their Annual Convention in San Francisco, California December 27-30, 1976

CS 501 521

TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ON THE GRADUATE LEVEL

For at least six years now the SCA has been urged to give high priority to the improvement of communication between cultures and nations.[1] The need for efficient communication across such lines is obvious and pressing. Tremendous technological strides have been made in recent years. International television is now a commonplace reality. Cooperative space exploration, international efforts to maintain peace, growing interdependency between nations wealthy in raw materials and those equipped to efficiently transform those materials into manufactured products, all point to the need for all-out efforts to gain better understanding of the values, laws, traditions and communication customs of people in other lands.

But improved understanding of the various "neighborhoods" in our "global village" is not motivated by curiosity or economic considerations alone. With the awesome arsenal of nuclear weapons being amassed by a growing list of nations-both large and small-improved international communication is not only a necessity for continued material prosperity; it is also a crucial ingredient in insuring world survival.

This paper outlines a method of teaching International-Intercultural communication which proved quite successful in meeting the following minimal goals:

First, to provide the class with a uniform set of terms and definitions for those terms in considering communication problems encountered in communication across cultures.

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[1] William S. Howell, "Preview of the Convention, 1970", SCA Spectra (October, 1970), p. 1.

Second, to allow class members to examine in-depth some of the unique problems encountered in intercultural communication between ethnic groups emigrating to America and the general population of the U.S..

Third, to provide the students with extensive experience in interacting with people of cultures other than their own.

Fourth, to give the students insight into methods in current use to help overcome cultural barriers and;

Fifth, to give the students experience in investigating, analyzing and reporting on a culture of their choice.

The course was taught in a seminar setting during the fall, 1975 semester at Eastern Illinois University. The text used was Condon and Yousef's An Introduction to Intercultural Communication. The book was supplemented by a reading list of pertinent articles and other reference books to allow a wide range of reading. As the class was small (8-10 students) and taught on a upperclassmen-graduate level, there was ample opportunity for the students and instructor to interact freely both among themselves and with guest speakers who visited the class from time to time.

Intercultural communication was defined as communication across intranational lines (i.e., ethnic group assimilation in the U.S.) during the initial part of the course. Later that concept was expanded to international communication or communication between nations whose languages differ. Such an approach allowed the students to use material covered early in the course as a basis for the more complex analysis needed when discussing value and linguistic differences between nations.

The first few class meetings were spent in establishing a uniform understanding of terms pecular to communication across cultural lines. Such concepts

as "culture shock," "cultural sterotyping," "cultural value orientations," "subliminal cultural barriers," and "xenophobia and its latent manifestations" were discussed in detail. Safeguards against faulty inferences across cultural lines were also discussed. Included in such discussions was the importance of withholding judgment until reasons for certain cultural actions are understood: the need to guard against ethocentrism; "different" does not mean "wrong"; and proxemic considerations and other cultural variables were also examined.

Once the basic foundation was laid, the students were given their first assignment. Each student prepared a 30 minute oral report on an immigrant ethnic group in the United States and discussed the difficulties experienced by members of that group in assimilating into the North American culture. Cultural differences were especially noted as well as problems related to such factors as physiognomy, clannishness, language barriers and other potentially divisive characteristics. This allowed the students (all U.S. citizens except for one native of China) to work from the United States culture to the relatively unknown values of the culture from which the group emigrated. As a result, the students seemed to gain some empathy with the problems of immigrants.

In order to set the scene for later work, a number of persons who had spent considerable time in foreign cultures were invited to speak to the class. This approach paid massive dividends (and, I might add, saved a lot of work for the instructor as well!!) Among our guests was the Vice President for Student Activities at EIU who had spent ten months as an educational advisor in Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon). He not only provided interesting insights into the Sri Lankan culture but also brought some of the native food for the students to

taste. Some of the "delicacies" he ate while in Sri Lanka (such as roast dog, broiled cobra and fried monkey) were not provided--much to the student's relief! The head of the EIU foreign student advisement center provided a unique contrast to the usual "culture shock" experience. She was born to U.S. parents who were serving as missionaries in Brazil. She spent the first ten years of her life in Brazil and as a result, absorbed much of the culture there. When she ultimately came to the United States she had considerable difficulty in adapting to her native culture even though she thought she had been quite well prepared for the change by her parents. Wolfgang Schlauch, of the EIU History Department and--as one might guess--a native German, gave the class a description of the German educational system and provided insights into the German culture. Geraldina Ortiz of the EIU foreign language department dispelled some myths about Puerto Ricans in general and the Hispanic cultures in general. And Ken Hadwiger reported on some of the problems of mass communication in the international setting.

The common thread running through each visitor's report was that there seemed to be five elements which are chief considerations when one moves from one culture to another. These include: (1) difficulty with the "new" language, (2) lack of trust for the foreigners, (3) adapting to the native food and drink, (4) learning unstated cultural expectations and (5) the malaise and disorientation caused by culture shock.

While the lecture forums were interesting, perhaps one of the most vital exchanges came when a group of four foreign students--representing the widely diverse cultures of Malaysia, Japan, Brazil and Mexico-interacted with class members about the difficulties they experienced in studying, dating and generally adapting to life in the United States. This established a good rapport with the foreign students and revealed that they had similar worries and hang-ups that U.S.

students have in terms of peer interaction. However, the pressures on foreign students was intensified because they had to learn to cope with the strange customs and the subtle, often non-verbalized cues people from the United States learn subconsciously as they grow up.

The major assignment of the course was an in-depth analysis of communication problems in a foreign culture. First, each student was to write a term paper concerning the culture he chose to analyze. This paper was to reflect a synthesization of extensive interviews with natives of the nation under consideration. It was also to manifest broad and in-depth reading about the nation and report on any other methods of investigation employed to complete their intellectual immersion in the examined culture. Second, the students presented an hour-long report concerning the assigned culture. At the time they also provided a one or two page handout capsulizing salient points they found unique in that society and suggested methods of adapting to these unusual (by U.S. standards) laws, traditions or customs. They were also assigned to use slides, taped excerpts of the music of the culture, and other audio-visual support systems to keep interest at a high level. Some even brought persons from the culture under consideration to help with the report. To add involvement, the reports were peer-evaluated.

Finally, the students refined and summarized their term reports into articles submitted for publication. This meant that they wrote the articles, handed them in for correction and later came in for consulation on a one-to-one basis. Then, when the article was judged sufficiently strong to merit consideration for publication, they were mailed. While none of them were published, the instructor felt that this undertaking was worthwhile because it gave the students experience in synthesizing and--I suppose--helped build the character most of us have built by receiving the

N.T.D. (nice turndown) from a journal editor.

The feedback on the course was, for the most part, excellent. While the students gained considerable insight into other cultures, the idea that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing," was continually reinforced. Just because they knew some of the major differences between selected cultures, they indicated, did not mean they could completely cope with the problems of intercultural communication. But they did feel they had a good background to lead to relatively smooth assimilation in new cultural settings. The students also indicated that they realized there are many subtle cultural characteristics which are, as Geraldina Ortiz put it, "imbibed through one's mother's milk." That is, one must be raised in a culture to understand its non-verbal values and customs thoroughly.

The result of that realization made the students more confident and at the same time more tentative. They were buoyed up in their confidence of being able to handle major communication barriers. But they were more tentative in making generalizations about people of other cultures based on the surface appearance of their actions.

Attached to this report is a day by day schedule which I found workable in teaching the described course. The course met an hour and a half two days a week so due adjustments would have to be made for other time allotments. I trust it will provide an approach which you may modify to meet your own needs should you teach a similar course. I found the experience stimulating and worthwhile. I trust that your adaptations will prove equally satisfying.

SPEECH 5030
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
Unit I-to October 30

Date	Assignment
Aug. 28	Orientation. An overview of the course.
Sept. 2	Lecture: chapter 3. Condon and Yousef.
4	Barriers to effective intra and inter-Cultural Communication.
9	Report by Dr. Smith. Choice of major culture to zero in on.
11	Reports on immigrant assimilation.
16	Reports on immigrant assimmilation continued.
18	Reports on immigrant assimilation continued.
23	Reports in class. Read chapters 1 and 2-Condon.
25	Reports in class. Mexican Research handout.
30	Conclude reports. Doing a full scale research project. BE SURE TO HAVE READ MATERIAL ASSIGNED IN SAMOVAR - PORTER (ON RESERVE.) pp. 279-320.
Oct. 2	Dr. Glenn Williams reports on four stage culture shock and Sri Lankan culture. (Read up on Ceylon and have questions).
7	Eulalee Anderson of Foreign Students advisement works with class.
9	Non-Verbal Communication in the international situation. Read ch. 6 in Condon and Yousef.
14	Lecture over chapter 4 in Condon and Yousef
16	Dr. Wolfgang Schlauch will conduct a discussion of the German Culture. Do some reading on the German communication development. See journals.
21	EXAM OVER ALL MATERIAL COVERED TO DATE.
23	Dr. Ken Hadwiger will discuss international communication and the SCA's role therein.
28	Discussion of Condon Chapter 5. Review Exam.
30	Interaction with selected foreign students.

The readings listed here were minimal. Others were assigned as the class progressed. Especially useful were Larry Samovar and Richard E. Porter's Intercultural Communication: A Reader (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1972) and Michael Prosser's Intercommunication Among Nations and Peoples, (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). A listing of twenty pertinent Journal articles was also provided.

Unit II
Speech 5030--1975

Nov. 4 Read chapter II in Condon and Yousef. Methods of Training will also be covered.

6 Read chapter 9 in Condon and Yousef. Cross cultural interviewing.

11 Read Condon chapter 8, Language and Culture. Report on Russia and detente'. Term Papers Due.

13 Read chapter 10 in Condon and Yousef. Report on Japan.

18 Report on English culture.

20 Report on India's culture

25 Report on the Eskimo culture. Short Paper Due.

27 THANKSGIVING

Dec. 2 Report: The Impact of American Films Abroad.

4 Report on Chinese culture.

9 Report on Jamaican culture.

11 Wrap-up and Final Exam.

The oral report should include some background of the culture investigated: enough history to set the scene, HOWEVER, KEEP IT COMMUNICATION ORIENTED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. ESPECIALLY DRAW CONTRASTS BETWEEN U.S. CULTURE AND THE NATION REPORTED ON. FEEL FREE TO USE SLIDES, PORTIONS OF MOVIES, PERSONS FROM THE CULTURE INVESTIGATED ETC., TO ADD COLOR AND INTEREST TO THE REPORT. Reports should last about an hour with the other twenty to thirty minutes for questions and comments. Reports will be peer evaluated.